

THIS ROTARIAN AGE

By

PAUL P. HARRIS

PRESIDENT EMERITUS

ROTARY INTERNATIONAL

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This book is affectionately dedicated to Rotary in the advancement of whose ideal the author in company with thousands of other admirers loves to serve.

PAUL HARRIS

INTRODUCTION

At last, we have the story of Rotary by its Founder, Paul P. Harris. It is not merely a recital of what happened in 1905 or the years immediately following. It is an interesting story of Rotary — of yesterday, of today, and of tomorrow — written by one who had a fundamental idea and has witnessed and assisted in its development, and has developed with it. To Paul Harris, always a philosophic and persuasive leader in Rotary, the movement is greatly indebted. In the writing of this book he has again placed us all under deep obligation to him — for the accurate, fair, discerning, and appreciative manner in which he has analyzed what has happened, what is happening, and what is likely to happen.

If anyone is ever discouraged about being a Rotarian because there is not enough humanness to the movement, he will be put at ease by reading this work. If one has been discouraged about the Rotary movement not being big enough or important enough for him to be associated with, this work surely will convince him otherwise.

That the Rotary movement is like a great musical production of many parts, through all of which runs a single motif — or perhaps a tapestry of many parts through all of which a single golden strand is discernible — is the impression that one must get from reading "This Rotarian Age," described to us so interestingly by one whom the movement has honored with the title of President Emeritus, and who continues to honor and serve the movement by his own life and by his continued and faithful devotion to Rotary.

CHESLEY R. PERRY.

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THIS ROTARIAN AGE

"Where shall I begin, please your Majesty?" he asked.

"Begin at the beginning," the king said, very gravely.

"And go on till you come to the end; then stop."

—*"Alice's Adventures in Wonderland."*

Rotary has been the subject of friendly comments without number and the target of a few animadversions not so friendly. Both have served purposes, not always the purposes the writers have had in mind. A phenomenon sufficiently luminous to attract the attention of millions of people in scores of nations should be better understood.

Mr. G. K. Chesterton, whose references to Rotary have revealed no inclination to flatter, has on one occasion at least, referred to the present period of the world's history as "this Rotarian age." To Rotarians there is some consolation in the thought that he concedes that the movement is making imprint upon the times, even though he does make it manifest that he considers the step from the Victorian age to the Rotarian age a step backwards.

It would not be fair to the critics of Rotary, who include some of the most brilliant of the British and American writers, to charge them with prejudice. It can, however, in truth be stated that thousands of the great educators of many nations, not less profound, even if less scintillating, differ with them in their conclusions. The enrollment of such men is testimony to the fact that in-

sincerity and superficiality are not necessary qualifications for membership.

After having made due allowances, however, for the difference between the esoteric and the exoteric viewpoints, and admitting that a member of an organization is not the ideal person to whom to look for a fair appraisal of its qualities, even a member, by reason of long connection with the movement, may be able to marshal facts of interest to those to whom Rotary is a quandary, leaving the reader to commend or condemn to suit himself.

One desiring to make further study of the movement would do well to read "Rotary?", a survey made by seven social scientists of the University of Chicago; "Rotary — A Business Man's Interpretation" by Frank Lamb, formerly a member of the faculty of the University of California; and "The Meaning of Rotary" by Vivian Carter, a journalist of London, England.

As to this particular book the writer must admit in advance that he is distinctly partisan although he has tried to be fair. He is one of the one hundred and fifty-six thousand members who love Rotary and believe in it. Most naturally, the critics emphasize the things in Rotary which they do not like. Most naturally, the writer emphasizes the things which, in common with his fellow Rotarians, he does like.

A member who would write the story of Rotary must obtain suitable perspective. It is human to magnify the importance of the immediate, not easy to realize that the high values of today may be the low values of tomorrow. What at present is, in the minds of the majority, always will be. In the present lies the perfection which past generations have died for and which future generations will

venerate. To such, civilization has attained its Ultima Thule. Viewed in improper perspective, the creations of Raphael and Angelo are monstrosities; viewed in proper perspective they are immortal.

How can a Rotarian divorce his thoughts from the immediate, the international convention of yesterday, the club meeting of today, all so important, so impressive? Verily we live in the present and well that it is so. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" and, if we may be permitted, the happiness thereof, also.

But divorce himself from the present he must, if he is to obtain suitable perspective. He must think not only of Rotary itself, but also of its relation to other things equally important. Is it of the eternal cosmos, or will it whiff out leaving nothing to challenge the attention of historians of the future except the epitaph, "Born February 23, 1905. Died ——. A brief but happy life"?

We may properly think of Rotary's ancestral and environmental influences. It is manifest that a movement, which has gone so far in the brief period of thirty years, must have been the result of slowly gathering forces; it could not have been the inspiration of any one man or group of men; it could not have been spontaneous any more than earthquakes or volcanoes can be spontaneous.

Considered in this light, the life span of Rotary cannot be measured by a score or so of years; it is of ancient lineage and its ancestry includes men of many nations of diverse languages and customs. To trace its ancestry, one must press back through the ages.

TWILIGHT

TWILIGHT

"When God sends the dawn, He sends it for all."

—CERVANTES.

In "The Outline of History," Mr. Wells writes: "Somewhere, about 50,000 years ago, if not earlier, appeared Homo Neanderthalensis (also called Homo Antiquus and Homo Primogenus) a quite passable human being."

In the cold, shivering twilight, preceding the daybreak of civilization, the dominating emotion of man was fear. He shrank in terror in the presence of forces beyond his control and ruthlessly destroyed beings within his dominion. Self-preservation was the controlling motive. Life was his most sacred possession and was to be preserved at any cost. Lives of other beings, human or brute, were of no significance.

Selfishness was unrivalled, supreme, and unopposed except by selfishness. That which was coveted was appropriated if not guarded by superior forces. The human animal, though lacking the strength of the lion, the ferocity of the tiger, and the agility of the ape, possessed a brain of potentiality and thereby gained dominion over the lower orders.

Sex attraction served to propagate the species, but man long remained slightly above beasts of prey. He heard the song of birds and witnessed the play of the young, but he was serious. His world was filled with dread things of

reality and even more dread things of imagination. Suspicion begat fear and fear begat enmity.

In course of time, religion came with its rites invoking the aid of good spirits which were even more powerful than the bad spirits, and thus for the time being tempered the agony of fears. But primitive man had enemies real as well as imaginary, and they were not subject to priestly sorceries. The bludgeon, and, in course of time, the bow and arrow were brought into play to defend man from his flesh-and-blood enemies. Then, as now, offense was considered the best method of defense. Fear took no chances. Better slay first and think later. Strangers possibly might not be harboring ill-will, but the natural assumption was that they were and that they were waiting opportunity to give it expression.

In Mr. Wells' "Somewhere" men were harassed by enemies real and enemies imaginary. Night hours were rendered hideous by the play of evil spirits in flashing lightning and booming thunder, and the day was filled with terrors of skulking enemies in wooded glens; and neither day nor night offered respite from fears.

Then one who might have led the way out of the era of distraction was born. In course of time he learned to lift his thoughts above the common level. To him, precedent had meaning if it squared with reason; not otherwise. His thoughts were free from bias. Neither thunder nor lightning caused him to tremble, nor did he fear the stranger. He could have led his people out of their wilderness but for an untoward event. He ventured too far. One morning as he stood on a high rock gazing at the rising sun as had been his custom, there was a sharp twang of a bow-string, the whirl of an arrow, the thud of a fallen body,

and far down in the valley by the swift-flowing, rock-bound stream lay all that was left of him who had lived in advance of his times. He was the first in whose bosom dwelt the spirit of good-will toward all men.

A Teacher, whose name became immortal, arose to embrace the doctrine of the brotherhood of man, giving it religious sanction as a part of the "inspired word." He suffered contumely, ridicule, disdain, and eventually death for having lived too far in advance of His times, but His doctrines lived in the hearts of His devoted followers who grew in number until they girded the earth. Other religions taught the doctrine of universal brotherhood and made it an essential part of their faiths.

Centuries later was born in Scotland another who lived in advance of his time, one who stoutly refused to do obeisance to unreasoning precedent; one whose soul overflowed with the poetry of life. Of all the words of the Scottish bard, none will be more highly appraised nor longer remembered, than

"Then let us pray that come what may,
As come it will for a' that,
That sense and worth o'er a' the earth
May bear the gree, and a' that.
For a' that and a' that,
It's coming yet, for a' that,
That man to man the world o'er
Shall brothers be, for a' that."

In the compass of these words have been found all the philosophy, all the hope, the substance of every prayer of the first seer, but how vain were the aspirations and hopes of this widely separated twain. Primordial forces were to

be reckoned with, as is also the case even now though generations have lived and died since the lips of the sage of Ayr were sealed in death.

As the sun breaks through the clouds, so the love of fellowship has from time to time throughout the ages broken through the crust of suspicion and hatred. Slowly and gradually men who have loved fathers, mothers, sisters, and brothers have drawn neighbors and friends within their circles. The primitive manifestations were crude but culture is not a *sine qua non* of good-will. Rare Ben Jonson surrounded himself with men of his kind, but Burns perforce found companionship in yokels.

Many obstacles to the expansion of good-will have presented themselves. Differences in languages and religions have been among the most formidable, but commercial rivalries have also been dissension-breeders. Average public opinion has always been in favor of the limited circle. To leave matters as they were was to be in popular favor; to sponsor the broader outlook was to become a social outcast. Many who now view as a matter of course the march of civilization to its present stage and find satisfaction in it, are skeptical as to the future. History has no lesson for them. Had they lived in the cave period, they would have branded traitor, him within whose heart first dwelt the spirit of good-will toward all men.

THE
CRADLE
OF
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

